

Policy & Environmental Change (PEC):

Improving the Health of Your Community

Daily, the media reminds us of the serious public health problems that plague America:

- ☑ epidemic rates of obesity and diabetes
- ☑ high rates of death from heart disease, stroke, and cancer
- ☑ poor nutritional and physical activity habits
- ☑ high cost of health care
- ☑ implications of an aging population on health care costs and the burden of disease
- ☑ disparities in health status among our citizens

These health problems cannot be solved solely through changing individuals' actions and health choices. We must collectively work to create communities where healthy choices are easy, acceptable, and supported. Communities that implement policies and create environments that incorporate the previous characteristics are healthier and more satisfying places to live, work, and play.

What is Policy & Environmental Change?



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." -- Margaret Mead

Making changes in policies and environmental settings where people live, work, and play can provide essential support for individuals to increase daily physical activity, select healthier foods, and decrease exposure to tobacco and its byproducts.

Policies and environmental changes can assist large groups of people with living a healthy lifestyle, rather than just one or two individuals helped by traditional health promotion intervention focused on behavior change alone.

Policies are laws, regulations, and rules (both formal and informal) and they can support **or** inhibit healthy lifestyles. Examples of health policies include: laws and regulations that restrict smoking in public buildings; organizational rules that provide time off during work hours for physical activity; and policies that prohibit the sale of soda at school during the meal hour.

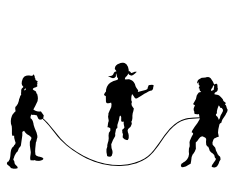
Environmental interventions are changes to the economic, social, or physical environments. Examples of healthy environments include: incorporating walking paths and recreation areas into new land development plans; making low-fat choices available in cafeterias; and removing ashtrays.

Why Should My Organization Become Involved in Policy & Environmental Change?

C.E.A. Winslow, one of the leading figures in the history of public health, characterized public health practice as the science and art of disease prevention, prolonging life, and promoting health and well-being through organized community effort . . . to assure everyone a standard of living adequate for the maintenance or improvement of health.

Your support of health policy and healthy environmental settings is critical in creating and maintaining a healthy community!





RESOURCES FOR POLICY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE (PEC):

The Michigan Department of Community Health and its partners offer several free tools to assist you in identifying policy and environmental changes (PEC) you can make to support healthy eating, physical activity, and tobacco-free lifestyles. Visit www.mihealthtools.org to access the following PEC tools:

Healthy Community Checklist – A 40-item quick assessment of a community's health environment related to promoting physical activity, healthy eating/healthy weight, and tobacco-free lifestyles.

Promoting Active Communities - Online self-assessment to support communities in identifying actions they can take to make it easier for people to be active – from zoning rules to worksite wellness to education. Communities that successfully complete the assessment are eligible for the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness Active Community Award and associated recognition events.

Designing Healthy Environments at Work - Determine the extent to which your worksite supports employee health. The website also provides information and resources for worksites that want to take steps to create healthy work environments.

Healthy School Assessment Tool – A self-assessment and planning instrument to help schools take positive action, and the Healthy School Environment Recognition Program, to recognize schools who have demonstrated significant accomplishments in creating healthy environments.

Nutrition Environmental Assessment Tool – On-line assessment that assists communities in ideas on how to make fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods easily accessible. The website also provides resources for these changes.

Smoke Free Community Assessment - Will soon be an on-line assessment to determine how supportive a community is to smoke free living. The assessment allows health coalitions to inventory the current supports and gain ideas on how to increase the smoke-free policies and environments within their community.

EXAMPLES OF POLICY & ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE:

Low or No Cost Ideas

- ☒ Develop and promote farmers' markets
- ☒ Identify safe walking/biking routes to school and encourage use
- ☒ Promote walking paths and trails
- ☒ Collaborate with stores to offer fruits & vegetables, locally grown
- ☒ Work with movie theatres, video stores, roller rinks, etc. to have healthy snack options
- ☒ Combine efforts with local restaurants to offer & promote healthy food options
- ☒ Implement 24/7 smoke-free policies at local governmental buildings
- ☒ Collaborate with physician/clinician practices to ask and counsel patients on health behaviors . . . sharing with them the resources within the community
- ☒ Open schools to community for use
- ☒ Increase the number of healthy options in vending machines

Contact us: Several State of Michigan departments are collaborating to assist in identifying policy and environmental changes that communities can implement to increase the healthy eating, physical activity and tobacco cessation of their residents. For more information, contact:

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